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ABSTRACT

Prospective theater teachers not only can be trained to develop self-actualization in high school students, but they must develop self-actualization in themselves. Self-actualization, as the cornerstone of humanism, emphasizes the achievable goal of being (rather than becoming) creative, spontaneous, curious, concerned about others, self-sufficient, and truthful. Since communication serves as the crux of developing self-actualization in young people, the drama/theater framework provides the logical set-up for leading adolescents toward self-actualization. Prospective theater teachers may be trained to do this through noncompetitive play and Gestalt awareness exercises. Thus, by playing at and reinventing games of their own design, prospective teachers both learn to adopt dramatic techniques to fit classroom situations and therapeutically enrich their own lives. (A bibliography is included.) (JM)

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Can Prospective High School Theatre Teachers Be Trained To Utilize Drama-Theatre Processes To Develop Self-Actualization in High School Students?

By

W. Laird Mayhew

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Can Prospective High School Theatre Teachers Be Trained to Utilize Drama--Theatre Processes To Develop Self-Actualization in High School Students?

My first impulse is to respond affirmatively to the title question; but since a perfectly natural reaction on your parts could well be "So what?" maybe I had better clarify what I mean by Self-Actualization, and why it has become so important in our teacher training program. Let me begin by quoting from "The Cocktail Party"--

> ...They may remember
> The vision they have had, but they cease to regret it,
> Maintain themselves by the common routine,
> Learn to avoid excessive expectation,
> Become tolerant of themselves and others,
> Giving and taking, in the usual actions
> What there is to give and take. They do not repine;
> Are contented with the morning that separates
> And the evening that brings together
> For casual talk before the fire
> Two people who know they do not understand each other;
> Breeding children whom they do not understand
> And who will never understand them...
> And the other life will be only like a book
> You have read once, and lost...

It has been suggested that Eliot has put his finger on the prevailing attitude of Modern Man: a constant longing for understanding and togetherness which seems unattainable, or perhaps something lost rather than never attained.

Self-Actualization seems to provide an answer to Eliot's puzzle. Self-Actualization is the cornerstone of the most recent arrival on the psychological scene--Humanism. It has been defined as an ultimate state, a far goal, Being rather than Becoming; the actualization process means the development of existing or latent potential--in other words, becoming fully human.

This smacks of the fairy tale, doesn't it? After all, haven't we all learned that humans are controlled by rigid determinism, that we are not the masters of our fate? In order for me to take Humanism out of the realm of fantasy, and place it in its proper perspective, it becomes necessary to summarize the psychological schools of thought which preceded Humanism in Western culture, and against which Humanism has been developed as a defense mechanism.

The modern history of the Western world has been strongly influenced by two schools of such thought: Freudianism and Behaviorism.

The former developed as a reaction against the theories of "willpower" and "the rational behavior of Man" which characterized the Romantic Movement of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries. To the Freudian, Man was the product of accidental evolution, the religious explanation of Creation being a childish delusion. Human behavior was reducable to chemical and physical dimensions. An irrational, conscienceless Id was the basis of every man and had to be controlled by the imposed morality of the Super-Ego, which was constantly at war with the Id; the resultant behavior (often psychotic) was the Ego. Hatred and sex were at the core

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The former developed as a reaction against the theories of "willpower" and "the rational behavior of Man" which characterized the Romantic Movement of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries. To the Freudian, Man was the product of accidental evolution, the religious explanation of Creation being a childish delusion. Human behavior was reducable to chemical and physical dimensions. An irrational, conscienceless Id was the basis of every man and had to be controlled by the imposed morality of the Super-Ego, which was constantly at war with the Id; the resultant behavior (often psychotic) was the Ego. Hatred and sex were at the core of all human relations. Philosophically, Freud was a logical result of the attitudes of Nihilism exemplified by Nietzsche and his contemporaries.

Behaviorism drew upon Freudianism for some basics: the concepts of accidental evolution, the chemical/physical limitations of Man, for example. Added to these were the

concepts that external environmental objects were the primary influencers of development; that conditioned reflexes were prime stimulators of development; that personality was only the end product of our habit systems (instincts); and that there was no scientific basis for morality. Sensations, perceptions, images, desires, emotions, purpose, and affective (abstract) thought did not exist in their lexicon. Philosophically, a direct line of descent can be traced back from the strict determinists of Behaviorism to Sade. In The Rebel, Camus suggests that the attitudes of negativism, dehumanization and Nihilism are exemplified in varying degrees by Nietzsche, Sade and others; with nothing more than statistics to believe in, after all, what point is there to optimism? Probably most of us can see ourselves in Eliot's haunting lines, neither understanding nor being understood. Inevitably this leads to Nihilism.

Termed the Third Force for obvious reasons, Humanistic psychology seems to be primarily a product of the Twentieth Century. Its advocates have borrowed much that was useful from Freudianism and Behaviorism. But the element that distinctly divides the Third Force from its predecessors--the element which increasing numbers of us think bids fair to change the total concept of the Western cultural pessimism dating back to Aristotle--is that Man's strengths are more important than his weaknesses; that humans are capable of something grander than war, prejudice, hatred; that aggression is more the result of culture than heredity. Studying mentally healthy people rather than the mentally ill (as did Freud), and studying individuals rather than groups (as do the Behaviorists), Abraham Maslow and his constituents have come to the conclusion that there are significant differences between men and animals; that subjective approaches to the study of Man tell us more about the human condition than do objective approaches; and that both Freudianism and Behaviorism ignore characteristics unique to Man, such as self-sacrifice, shame, humor, conscience, ideals, patriotism, appreciation of art, beauty, etc. The Humanists believe that their approach combines the best of internal/intrinsic concepts of being with the most useful of external/extrinsic and environmental determinants. Through a ideological stretch of the imagination, the philosophical roots of Humanism might be found in pre-Aristotelian blending of Apollonian and Dionysian views of life.

I believe that Western culture is much more strongly influenced by Nietzschian/Sadist Nihilism than we realize. But even Nietzsche believed that such attitudes were not instinctive to humanity: Man had achieved positive fulfillment, for example, prior to the state of being in Greece which produced Euripides, and Aristotle is often acknowledged the father of modern thought (modern negativism might be a more apt term). Based both on study of the works of the Humanists, and on my own observations as a teacher over a period of twenty years, I believe firmly that it is possible to overcome Nihilistic cravings by placing greater emphasis upon the development of Self-Actualization. So, a better phrasing of my title question might well have been to deal with the necessity for teacher trainees to learn to use Self-Actualization, rather than the mere possibility that they might.

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For we must change our trend toward negativism in order to survive psychologically. Barry Stevens has written that she considered it to be "...the history of Man to go from belief (concept) to belief (concept) and each time to get stuck. The beliefs are useful (releasing) for awhile--a fresh way of looking at things, leading to change--but then we accept them as reality and so don't notice when they become a handicap, because we have stopped questioning. A final answer

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is the end, and that is death. When the feeling of dying (non-living) becomes too cramping for too many, it takes conflict and upheaval for a new belief to come into being. But... a new era can happen, as it is happening...in those scientists who say that there are always alternate theories..." She goes on to approve that these scientists are satisfied with the theories if they do what they were designed to do; there is no need to prove that they are the only theories possible for the solution of given problems.

The psychiatrist Karen Horney has reasoned: "If the release of anxiety causes the patient to become more affectionate and less hostile, does this not indicate that affection is basic to human nature, while hostility is not?" Ah, but that is psychotherapy, one might say, and we are teachers, not therapists. Let me go on.

As a major spokesman for the Humanists, Abraham Maslow believes that Self-Actualization is an achievable state for most of us, and that only a tiny percentage now achieve this state because the rest are blinded to their potential by culturally imposed strictures; most individuals have the capacity for creativeness, spontaneity, caring for others, curiosity, continual growth, loving reciprocity and other characteristics found in Self-Actualized people. To Maslow, persons who behave "badly" are reacting to the deprivation of basic needs. These needs he defines as physiological, safety, belongingness/love, aesthetic, knowing and understanding, and self-determination. Preconditions for basic need satisfaction he lists as being freedom, justice, honesty, fairness, order, challenge (stimulation). And successful achievement of these needs lead to wholeness, completeness, fulfillment, spontaneity, richness of life, simplicity, rightness, goodness, uniqueness, effortlessness, playfulness, realization of truth, and self-sufficiency.

Lest this read like a Christmas wishlist, let me point out that Maslow, Carl Rogers, Rollo May, Gordon Allport and others in the Humanist movement have uncovered sufficient empirical evidence of the existence of such Self-Actualized people as to make the possibility quite likely indeed! They also believe that Self-Actualized people can be developed--and what better place to do it than in the schools?

In "Transcendent Functioning," Gayle Privette has put it better than I could. As Privette points out, unfortunately, our schools make a sizeable contribution to our blindness to our potential. In schools, "...not only is little done to foster curiosity or the pursuit of fascination, but measures are taken to put a stop to wondering about unexplored possibilities by indoctrinating the student with belief in the infallibility of the printed word...students come to expect not to understand things that are well within the realm of understanding. The assumption that answers can be graded as right or wrong is treated as a certainty by many teachers. And students come to define "improbable" as meaning "impossible," and thereby dull their sensitivity to superficially covered possibility." And, as Bruno Bettelheim has stated time after time, if a child's efforts to get a response from the world and the people around him fail more than a very few times, he may well decide that there is no use in trying further. More often that not this leads to a withdrawal akin to that

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> I knew the mass of men concealed
> Their thoughts, for fear that if revealed
> They would by other men be met
> With blank indifference, or with blame reproved.
> I knew they lived and moved
> Tricked in disguises, alien to the rest
> Of men, and alien to themselves...

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What can we, as teachers, do to minimize this problem? I believe that teachers must learn to develop Self-Actualization in their students--but in order to do this, they must know the process themselves. In his lectures on "Love in the Classroom," Leo Bascaglia warns, "One thing we're not teaching the kids is how beautiful it is to be alive--and we're not teaching it because we don't believe it ourselves. We are so mired in the ugliness, so caught up in the degradation and muck that we can't look up and see the stars. In order to teach someone how beautiful life is, you've got to believe it yourself."

According to Carl Rogers, there are attitudinal elements which the teacher must reflect in order to create a growth-promoting climate: Congruence, which he defines as the teacher being genuine, without facade, openly belonging to and being the feelings and attitudes which at any given moment are within him; empathy, permitting the teacher to experience accurate empathic understanding of his students' private worlds, along with the ability to communicate to the students that he does understand; positive regard for each of his students as persons, which includes continuing belief that each student has worth regardless of particular behavior at any given moment (this equates with Agape, a kind of love that has strength, yet is non-possessive and non-judgmental); and finally, Rogers stresses that unless these attitudes can be communicated to and perceived by the students, they do not exist in their perceptual world, and so cannot be effective.

So we come to communication as the crux of developing Self-Actualization in young people...and what better place to expose youngsters to the elements of communication (both nonverbal and verbal) than within the spiritual birthplace of communication, the drama/theatre framework? This is why I consider the development of the characteristics of Self-Actualization (or its close relative, Transcendent Functioning) to be so important in the training of prospective teachers of drama and theatre. And it isn't too late for the teacher trainee to regain those childlike aspects which permit for both scientific investigation and Self-Actualization: "Growth is a process of fulfillment, realizing, emerging and becoming. Fundamental changes can and do occur at any age in personality, inner motivation, life style, and ways of coping with the world," say Jack and Lorraine Gibb.

As you must have noticed by this time, most of my examples come from the world of psychology. I really am suggesting that we, as teachers, should indulge in conscious therapy in our classes. Many of us feel distinctly uncomfortable with the concept of therapy as it is popularly used. Without the extensive training so necessary to the therapist, we ask, what right have we to dabble in it? The fact of the matter is that we do influence our charges therapeutically all the time; every word we utter, our body language, our very presence in the same space with young people (or our absence when they expect us to be there) is bound to exert some influence which--for good or ill--can only be seen as therapy. I think that it is important that we acknowledge our effect upon our students, prepare ourselves to make use of that effect in all possible ways for the good of the students.

Formal training in psychotherapy, while desirable in the ideal, is seldom possible for the teacher trainee in actuality

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Formal training in psychotherapy, while desirable in the ideal, is seldom possible for the teacher trainee in actuality. But perhaps this is not as important as we may think. I am certainly not advocating non-directive (and untrained) experimentation with young lives, but I agree with Carl Rogers when he states that "...therapy (like teaching) has to do with the relationship, and has relatively little to do with techniques, theory or ideology--it is the realness of the therapist in the relationship which is the most important element...our

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experience (in therapy) has deeply reinforced and extended my own view that the person who is able openly to be himself... as he is at the deepest levels able to be, is the effective therapist. Perhaps nothing else is of any importance...As the members of my class of prospective teachers learned, general principles are not as useful as sensitively discriminating reactions."

But still, some form of training is essential. Frank M. Whiting was referring to the director of children's theatre when he wrote, "Stanislavsky implies that those who are content with artificial flowers can manufacture them in a few hours using the direct approach: wire and crepe paper. Those, however, who prefer real blossoms must follow a much slower, more complex and devious route. They must prepare the soil, plant the seeds, remove the weeds, spray the pests, and finally with patience, wise effort and good luck they may produce some prize-winning blooms. It would be foolish indeed to suppose that one of the more complex living organisms, a skillful children's theatre director, could be produced with less care, cultivation and indirect control than a plant." And if this be true of the preparation of a theatrical director, can it be any less true for the prospective classroom teacher?

And so, how do we go about providing therapy-oriented training for the teacher trainee in drama? I say, let's go to draw the needed water of inspiration from our own well. The experiments of Stanislavsky were, after all, really experiments in human motivation and behavior. A starting point for those of us in the business of training prospective teachers might be found in some of the recent developments within our own field. John Sharpham, Jerry Miller and Leon Hymovitz, Dorothy Heathcote, Brian Way--all combine effective teaching and therapy in their dramatic activities; why not apply the same sorts of approaches which they use with children and adolescents to classes of teacher trainees? From Pestalozzi to Piaget, Dewey and Erikson--knowledgible people have been telling us for years that people learn significantly more through experiencing than through more cognitive techniques. Rogers might almost have been speaking of the traditional way of training teachers when he wrote: "If we distrust the human being, then we must cram him with information of our own choosing, lest he go his own mistaken way." Rogers' next thought relates to more enlightened possibilities: "But if we trust the capacity of the human for developing his own potentiality, we can permit him to choose his own way in his learning."

In our attempts to help prospective drama teachers understand Self-Actualization--and hopefully become able to strive for this blessed state themselves--we work with a process which was once referred to as Creative Problem-Solving, but which I now call Creative Opportunity Development (problem and solving having negative linguistic potentialities). Under this umbrella, trainees are exposed to opportunities to explore creative processes which they might adapt to their own development, through noncompetitive play, through Gestaltist awareness exercises--in short, through the direct experiencing of many processes which they can later modify for use with their own students. In the playing of non-competitive games, Spolin's terms (problem-solving, point of concentration, side-coaching)

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The motivational value of their feeling pride of creative ownership is obvious--the complexities of the ways in which minds work are much more subtle. Yet a growing body of empirical evidence supports the contention that (for most people) the mind retains and uses in valuable ways a much larger percentage of what it perceives as its own creation than of what is baldly imposed upon it by outside sources, no matter how authentic those sources might be. To learn, the student--be he child, adolescent or teacher trainee--should be helped, encouraged, and allowed to reinvent. Piaget states, "Anything is only understood to the extent that it is reinvented." In actuality, the objective characteristics of Spolin's techniques are much like the techniques found in Carl Rogers' Client-Centered therapy. In my own adaptation of these techniques, after each "experiencing," participants go through a process of evaluating, followed by a repitition of the activity (this time, utilizing the newly perceived information growing out of the evaluation). This procedure is akin to the "Experiencing, Analyzing, Synthesizing" steps of the California Drama/Theatre Framework.

So, by playing at, and reinventing games of their own design which might be applied to varied living situations, and by learning to adapt the process to these varied situations, the prospective teachers indulge in a two-fold form of development: they learn to adapt dramatic techniques to fit classroom situations for their future students; at the same time, their own lives are enriched therapeutically. Again quoting Rogers: "...the goal of education must be to develop individuals who are open to change, who are flexible and adaptive, who have learned how to learn, and are thus able to learn continuously... people who can live more comfortably with change than with rigidity." Thus, rigid determinism has no place in the learning process.

Incidentally, I believe that the ultimate outcome of Herbert Kohl's project with his Thirty-six Children was so discouraging to him because, as much as their lives had been enriched in his class, the children were not prepared to adapt to the unknown educational world outside that haven; therefore (it is assumed) they later became discouraged about using what they had learned from Kohl. Adaptability is a key element, therefore, in the training program of our prospective teachers.

Should we screen teacher trainees before opening our programs to them? Rogers describes such a screening process: "...we would endeavor to select individuals for...training who already possess in their ordinary relationships with other people, a high degree of these qualities: people who are warm, spontaneous, real, understanding, non-judgmental. We would plan the educational program for these trainees so they would come increasingly to experience empathy, and liking for others, and feel it increasingly easier to be themselves, to be real. By feeling understood and accepted in their training experiences, by being in contact with genuineness and absence of facade in their instructors, they would grow into more competent teachers. There would be as much focus in such training on the interpersonal experience as on intellectual learning. It would be recognized that no amount of knowledge of tests, measures, or of theory, or of diagnostic procedures could make the trainee more effective in his personal encounters with his pupils.

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So, by playing at, and reinventing games of their own design which might be applied to varied living situations, and by learning to adapt the process to these varied situations, the prospective teachers indulge in a two-fold form of development: they learn to adapt dramatic techniques to fit classroom situations for their future students; at the same time, their own lives are enriched therapeutically. Again quoting Rogers: "...the goal of education must be to develop individuals who are open to change, who are flexible and adaptive, who have learned how to learn, and are thus able to learn continuously... people who can live more comfortably with change than with rigidity." Thus, rigid determinism has no place in the learning process.

Incidentally, I believe that the ultimate outcome of Herbert Kohl's project with his Thirty-six Children was so discouraging to him because, as much as their lives had been enriched in his class, the children were not prepared to adapt to the unknown educational world outside that haven; therefore (it is assumed) they later became discouraged about using what they had learned from Kohl. Adaptability is a key element, therefore, in the training program of our prospective teachers.

Should we screen teacher trainees before opening our programs to them? Rogers describes such a screening process: "...we would endeavor to select individuals for...training who already possess in their ordinary relationships with other people, a high degree of these qualities: people who are warm, spontaneous, real, understanding, non-judgmental. We would plan the educational program for these trainees so they would come increasingly to experience empathy, and liking for others, and feel it increasingly easier to be themselves, to be real. By feeling understood and accepted in their training experiences, by being in contact with genuineness and absence of facade in their instructors, they would grow into more competent teachers. There would be as much focus in such training on the interpersonal experience as on intellectual learning. It would be recognized that no amount of knowledge of tests, measures, or of theory, or of diagnostic procedures could make the trainee more effective in his personal encounters with his pupils. There would be heavy stress on the actual experience of working with pupils, and the thoughtful and self-critical assessment of the relationships formed."

I do not believe that Rogers is minimizing the importance of knowing how to administer tests, or of diagnosing student problems--but neither is he giving them the undue importance which seems to be given in many of our colleges of education.

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The important observation of this quotation from my point of view is that we have found that nearly everyone who goes through the experience which Rogers describes begins to develop toward Self-Actualization, so the screening process becomes of less importance. Mutual trust between students, and between students and their teachers seems inevitable in such a framework. Along with mutual trust grow mutual support, use of intuitive reasoning, and adaptability. As a result of the federally funded CAREL Project on the Atlantic seaboard several years ago, program director Robert Alexander found that "Once a mutual trust is established, the evaluative process can be cooperative rather than competitive." Imagine no longer finding evaluation a threat! We find the the teacher trainees (as well as the young people in their charge once they leave us--a result of follow-up studies of our graduates) more open, more willing to accept valid criticism once an atmosphere of mutual trust has been firmly established.

"It seems clear that if we prefer to develop flexible, adaptive, creative individuals, we have a beginning knowledge as to how this may be done. We know how to establish in an educational situation, the conditions and the psychological climate which initiate a process of learning to be free," writes Rogers. He goes on to consider the "...dramatic evidence of what all of us have learned--that behind the curtains of silence and hallucination and strange talk and hostility and indifference, there is in each case a person, and that if we are skillful and fortunate we can reach that person and can live in a direct person-to-person relationship with him. It says something about the nature of Man and his craving for, yet fear of a deep human relationship. It seems to say that human beings are persons... I know that these moments of real relationship with these real persons have been the essential reward for all of us..." Rogers was, of course, referring to a psychiatric client, but in a truly satisfying learning relationship, cannot the same be said for teacher/student, or for instructor/teacher trainee encounters as well? And because of the nature of the dramatic experience, the teacher of drama and theatre has a unique opportunity--if not responsibility--to help his students toward Self-Actualization.

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